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FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7048
INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 6427
RUEHRL/AMEMBASSY BERLIN 0867
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 4029
RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW 2277
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 1178
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 5213
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEIDN/DNI WASHINGTON DC
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 5123
RHMFISS/HQ USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 7143
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RHMFISS/HQ USSOCOM MACDILL AFB FL
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NEW DELHI 003336

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [PREL](#) [KWMN](#) [PINR](#) [IN](#)

SUBJECT: INDIAN LEGISLATORS ELECT FIRST WOMAN PRESIDENT

REF: A. NEW DELHI 2805

[B](#). NEW DELHI 2865

[C](#). NEW DELHI 2991

Classified By: A/PolCouns Atul Keshap for reasons 1.4 (B,D)

[1](#). (SBU) Summary: After courting controversy and enduring a Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led assault (Ref B & C) on her alleged corruption, Pratibha Devisingh Patil swept the Indian Presidential election on July 19, becoming the first woman to hold the mostly ceremonial but prestigious office. On July 21, the Election Commission announced Patil won nearly two thirds of the votes cast in the race against Vice President (VP) Bhairon Singh Shekhawat. The newly formed United National Progressive Alliance (UNPA)'s leader, Jayalalithaa, unexpectedly broke ranks from others in the UNPA to encourage her AIADMK party members to vote, not abstain, revealing early cracks in the alliance. While the NDA/Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is left to lick its wounds, Congress is sitting pretty, having regained confidence and strength after ensuring a solid win thanks to its coalition and Left allies.

In Patil, Congress now has a loyalist who will help their cause after the 2009 national election. END SUMMARY.

CROSS-VOTING WORKS TO PATIL'S ADVANTAGE

[2](#). (SBU) In an electoral college comprising Members of Parliament (MPs) and Members of the each state's Legislative Assembly (MLAs), 88.5 percent of MPs and 91 percent of MLA's voted in the July 19 Presidential election. Results announced on July 21 showed Pratibha Devisingh Patil trounced her rival, former Vice President Bhairon Singh Shekhawat, winning over 65 percent of the actual vote compared to the NDA-supported Shekhawat's 33 percent.

[3](#). (SBU) Prior to the election, members of the electoral college were expected to vote across party lines to the benefit of Shekhawat. While cross-voting did take place, it

was Patil who benefited. Results surprisingly revealed key BJP-governed states cross-voted in favor of Patil, including Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Orissa, Bihar, and Jharkhand. Moments after the results were announced, Shekhawat resigned as Vice President of India.

JAYALALITHAA RENEGES ON UNPA PACT

14. (C) Despite an agreement reached by leaders of the newly formed UNPA to abstain from voting, AIADMK's leader and former Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu Jayalalithaa broke the pact and asked her party members to vote for NDA-backed Shekhawat. Political pundits believe her change of heart came after she struck back room deals ensuring BJP support for a future bid to return to political power in Tamil Nadu. Though this did not make a dent in Patil's vote tally, it did show the first signs of instability in the newly formed alliance, which is attempting to assert itself as an alternative to the BJP/NDA or Congress/UPA. The unraveling in the UNPA alliance became more pronounced on July 20, with Jayalalithaa visibly absent among the UNPA leaders filing nomination papers for the combine's pick for Vice President, Rasheed Masood.

COMMENT: CONGRESS STANDING STRONG

15. (C) Though the BJP leaked every piece of dirt they could find on Patil, attacking her character for the corrupt dealings of her relatives, legislators ignored their appeals to conscience. The Left demonstrated unwavering support for

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Congress' candidate and remained a true ally to the UPA. After this victory and an easy win expected for the UPA-Left supported VP candidate, things could not be brighter for Sonia Gandhi. Not only did the BJP prove ineffective as an opposition, but the UNPA appears to be coming undone as well. Additionally, Gandhi now has a strong Congress loyalist in the President's office, which could prove useful in the very realistic likelihood that no one party or coalition will win a clear majority in the national 2009 elections. Due to ambiguities in the Indian Constitution, the President enjoys a certain amount of discretion in determining who she will tap to form the next government. Sonia can take comfort in Patil's proven loyalty. While the BJP will remain the voice of opposition in the upcoming session of Parliament, its bark will be much bigger than its bite after this sorry performance.

16. (C) In contrast to outgoing President Abdul Kalam, who is viewed as an upstanding citizen and is highly revered by the people, Patil's victory has been lamented by some in the media as a "humiliation" for the nation. Her involvement in numerous corruption scandals to the benefit of her family members has been criticised as sullyng the highest office of the nation. Though Congress is lauding the event as landmark for women, even most women's rights organizations do not see her as an ally and do not expect to achieve legislative advances for women. Patil's selection solely for her pliability has raised the eyebrows of the average Indian citizen enough that many are questioning the current process for electing a President. While the nation will stand behind their new President, the media will be ready to find fault in her comportment. END COMMENT.

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